

inside the egg lives his heart

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by [AceofNowhere](#)

Summary

it was in the middle of her employee evaluation alina remembered she needed to feed the man she had chained up in her basement.

Darklina Day 6 Prompt: monster.

Notes

the style is intentional, because i'm pretentious like that

it was in the middle of her employee evaluation alina remembered she needed to feed the man she had chained up in her basement.

the man in the center of the panel frowned, but the two along with him on either side kept their straight faces. he pursed his lips and tapped the paper in front of him “not very consistent, work not up to standard—”

alina tuned him out and did not feel bad for the man she’d left alone, as she did every day she went to work. she scoffed. man, hardly. that thing fit the description of “man” as well as she did “model employee.” no, she didn’t have a man in her basement, she had the—

“areas of growth are substantial and lacks improvement across the board—”

“—disturbing behavior—”

she’d forgotten to give him breakfast because of this damn employee review. she was running late—again—and she couldn’t afford to be late again, not with her record. the job paid her bills and she couldn’t really afford to be—

“miss starkov, we thank you for your time here, but it has come to the attention of this panel that you might not be a good fit for our company. thank you for your service, but we will be letting you go.”

alina blinked at the men in front of her. fuck. she thought. there goes my medical.

the man said something more, about a stipend, about cleaning out her desk. when she got there, there was a box already waiting for her. thoughtful of them. she began to fill it up, but as she did it occurred to her she didn’t have much on her desk to bring with her. she managed to fill it a third full with pens and papers that didn’t really belong to her, and then she stuck her jacket in it just to fill it up.

she wasn’t sure if she was expected to stay the rest of the day, but she had a monster to feed, and she had no further use here anyway.

she grabbed the box and headed home. between point a and point b she threw the entire box away. she didn’t need anything from there anyway, and it felt a little satisfying, as much as alina felt satisfied these days amidst the cold and rotting depression she carried, to see the box squashed among old pizza and newspapers of a public transit trash can.

alina buried her nose in her scarf and rode the bus home, her mind blissfully silent.

when she climbed the stairs to her home, she thought about what she would do tomorrow. look for a job probably, she thought while unlocking the crooked front door. she didn’t have many skills, and now she was out of a reference no doubt.

alina snorted when she thought about her boss, the old hag who’d called for that employee evaluation anyway. she wondered just what she’d threatened that panel with to get them to fire her.

alina took out the bread and searched for anything else to eat, found some veggie spread and figured that'd do for now. alina had never been a model employee, but the sudden firing did seem awfully suspicious considering it'd been just a few days before alina had refused to continue working with that asshole in accounting who kept putting his hand on her knee and asking her personal questions.

the old guy was a sleaze. alina put the veggie-covered toast on a dirty plate, remembered to grab some water, and headed down into the basement. she had fucking self-respect and sometimes you had to stick up for yourself, even when it got you fucking fired.

it was definitely that, alina reasoned, and not because she was consistently late to work and failed to meet deadlines, not because over the past few weeks she'd spiraled and often came and left work without doing anything and forgetting she'd even left the house.

alina starkov was fine and was not losing it.

she entered the basement and looked to the shadows in the corner of the room, where her monster sat.

"Hello Alina," he called to her from the dark. "You're early today."

"yeah," she said, sitting down on the stool in front of him. "i got fucking fired so it's just you and me for awhile. hope you don't care about electricity."

the thing in the shadows looked at her curiously. his chains dangled from his wrists and he rubbed them in thought. "Did you enjoy your work, Alina?"

alina scoffed and took a bite of one of the toasts. the other she left for him, which he ignored. she fed him everyday, she thought, but she'd never seen him eat. but the food was always gone when she returned. funny.

"i did at one point i think," she shrugged. "it gets old though. same shit everyday. people i hate asking me for more day after day."

"You work for money then."

"i work to live."

"Are you living?" he smiled at her, as though they were on a first date, and they were just getting to know each other. she took another bite of toast.

"i'm alive, aren't i?"

he chuckled and leaned back into the shadows in the corner. only the brights of his eyes showed. "For now."

alina swallowed the dry toast and furrowed her brow. "oh no. i've got you here," she said, pointing at the basement around her. "i'm not letting you get out. you hear me? no one is dying today. not me most of all."

a quiet tsking sound came from the shadows. “Oh, Alina. Like calls to like. You’re so close to me. Come closer.”

alina felt the pull, the desire to shake off his chains and let him eat her, consume her like a flesh virus and to go down in a blazing flame where she’d never have to open her eyes to heinous reality again.

alina shoved the plate closer to him and stood.

“try again tomorrow asshole.”

and she left him there crippled by her chains with a half a piece of toast.

alina attempted to sleep that afternoon, having nothing, after all, to keep her awake, but sleep refused her companionship. she lay in bed, and noon became afternoon, became evening, became night, turned to early morning and she still couldn’t catch it.

in truth this had been the case for weeks, alina unable to rest properly, to shut her eyes and find a desperate moment away from her thoughts and memories.

but then even in dreams she was plagued, wasn’t she. she closed her eyes and shadows enveloped her, mal clutched her ankles and asked her for revenge. “why” he would ask, blood pouring from his mouth. “didn’t you love me?”

she never had an answer for him.

morning light spilled in through the window and alina gave up, went to the kitchen and made herself some coffee. she wondered if the monster below drank coffee. she’d had him in her basement for three weeks but she couldn’t recall if she’d ever given him any.

she made more toast, it was all she had, and trekked down to the basement with it and her coffee.

“Alina,” he called, voice purring from the corner. “How did you dream?”

she rolled her eyes at him “you damn well know i didn’t sleep”

he looked terribly satisfied though she could barely make his smile out in the shadows around them. “What do you dream, when you sleep? Do you dream of me, Alina?” a rasping sound came from around them and alina ignored it. “Do you dream of Death?”

alina thought about mal, about the other figures who coated her dreams.

“i think about pain. i think about mistakes.”

“How could they be mistakes, Alina?” the sound of the chain rattled and it made alina’s eyes droop, it sounded like a mother’s jewelry as she was being laid to rest. “Does pain create regret? Or does regret spur us on?”

alina closed her eyes and listened to his breathing. no, her breathing. that rasping sound was her. she couldn’t remember where she was anymore, she didn’t want to remember where she was.

“every time i dream i see their faces.” alina knew the voice was hers but she didn’t know if it was aloud or in her mind. she did see their faces, their beautiful, terrifying faces. when she dreamed, she couldn’t stop them from coming to her.

“I see their faces too, Alina.”

alina’s eyes shot open. she stood up suddenly and without another word, went upstairs.

she didn’t return to him for another week.

during that week, alina barely moved. she was a corpse, walking from room to room, squeezing her hands (it felt like they were warm, wet, but she couldn’t recall why) until small crescent shapes embedded themselves into her palms.

she didn’t call unemployment, she didn’t call a lawyer to see if she could sue her company for wrongful termination, she didn’t call the electric company to get an extension on her bill. she didn’t think about the thing that was in her basement.

but on the seventh day when the lights went out and the shadows grew, alina felt them all around her, her eyes shot open and she felt awake.

awake, really? for the first time in months she felt something curling in the pit of her stomach, something that excited her.

the doorbell rang.

alina walked to the door, pressed up against it. she could make out the outline of someone on the other side, someone slim, someone young. they fidgeted and she saw them reach for the doorbell again; they rang it again.

alina shuddered and put her hand on the door. she could open it. she could let them in. they could talk. they could get to know each other.

but she knew what it would lead to. that thing in the basement would take them away from her, like he had all the rest of them. she would be alone, so alone, always alone—

alina was shaking fully now, her breath coming in and out like in a panic. how long would she be forced in here? how long would alina be able to hold out?

the person on the other side of the door gave up, left.

alina took a deep breath from her side, laying her head against the wall. she'd been tested, and she'd passed.

alina brought nothing but water and some wrinkled carrots down to the basement. she was running low on food. she needed to leave to get more, but she couldn't leave the house. not with him down here.

"Alina," he purred. "Why didn't you open the door?"

alina pressed the plate down so hard it cracked. "you know why."

"I don't," he said. the shadows ebbed and flowed around him, but she could still make out his sharp gray eyes, following her.

why were those eyes so gentle? why did they make her want to scream?

"You're so hard on yourself, Alina." the chains rattled quietly, and she felt a little sleepy. "Why do you deny yourself what you need? If you must live, shouldn't you thrive?"

alina glared into the darkness, sleepiness gone. "i won't let it happen again. i won't let you win."

a flash of white pierced through the dark and alina felt a shiver go up her spine at the sight of his smile.

"I'm not here to play games with you, Alina. I'm here because I want you with me."

"you'll never have me," she spat.

"No, Alina," he acquiesced. "But you have me."

the electricity was out, the fridge was empty, but the water was still running. they couldn't take that away from her, even if she completely stopped paying the bills.

it occurred to her she might be found here in a few months, when the smell was too horrible for the neighbors to take, when her bills were so overdue someone would try to collect them.

but they'd tried hadn't they? they'd come to collect but she never opened the door. she was still winning, and she wouldn't open the door. she could hold out for at least that long.

the thing in the basement called out to her, so often—it was fucking annoying.

"Alina," he called, "Alina, my love. Alina. Alina."

she held her hands over her ears but then she felt like she was drowning. her hands ached, they needed something in them to feel strong again, but all they ever felt was warm and wet.

genya. zoya. botkin. nikolai. mal—

that name sent her careening and she heard that high-pitched sound, the one that always took her breath away.

it startled her to realize she was standing in the basement again, facing the shadows, with a knife in her hand.

for the first time in weeks she felt steady.

“Alina, my love,” he whispered, eyes glimmering in the shadows. “What do you have for me?”

alina let out a confident breath. “i’m ending this now,” she said. “i’m going to kill you and this will all be over.”

the shadow laughed. “Alina, you cannot kill me.”

the chains around him vibrated, hummed, and then they began to crumble.

alina was horrified as the shadow in the corner finally formulated into that man, the one she knew so well. he had shockingly thick black hair, an angled jaw and pronounced cheekbones, but it was his gray eyes that struck her, fixated on her as he stood and walked toward her.

he touched her hand and she gasped, dropping the knife.

“You can't kill me like you killed them.”

alina released a sob, but he didn’t let her go. he held her wrists and she looked down at his and there were no marks to show he’d been shackled all this time. had he been? she suddenly asked herself. had she contained him, or had he been staying with her this whole time?

“Remember, Alina,” he whispered so gently in her ear. “Remember everything.”

Alina leaned into him and sighed for an eternity.

genya. four months after living together she’d heard that high-pitched sound. it went on for only a few more days before Alina silenced it by cutting genya’s throat while she slept.

the rest—zoya, botkin, nikolai, there were more weren’t there?—all let go in the same way, a knife to their sleeping throats; simple, calm.

but mal had been her first, hadn’t he?

they’d been together for years. fighting. loving. antagonizing. caring. the high-pitched noise came to her in the night, and she ignored it for so long. her hands shook but she kept control.

but the night she came to him and stabbed him in the heart, wasn’t she gaining control? hadn’t she earned it?

mal didn’t scream, but he did cry. he asked her why.

Alina didn't know why. she had only done it because she needed to. Again and again when the high-pitched noise reached her, her hand would shake, the urge to take up the knife began again anew. she began to long for it, to need it. the feel of the blade in her hand felt like a homecoming, and the soft cry that came when she sliced someone's throat was a celebration.

now the God of Death held her in her arms, and she felt free.

"Koschei," she murmured, stepping further into his arms.

"That's what they call me," he said. he wiped the tears that streaked her glowing face, and seemed to Alina to almost hesitate. "I want to give you my name."

she said nothing, only waited. she could feel the knife on the floor as though it were an extension of herself. she could feel his hands on her face as though they were her own.

he dipped and pressed his mouth to her ear, kissing the shell softly. "My name is Aleksander," he said. "Will you take my name?"

Alina nodded, shivering, both from cold, dread, and relief. "Aleksander," she said.

he smiled and wrapped her in his arms, holding her so gently, like he was holding his whole world. "I've waited a long time for you, Alina."

"Aleksander."

he stepped back and walked toward the stairs. he held out his hand. "Come, Alina. Let us show them what Gods of Death are meant to do."

alina thought about Life. the pain she'd felt, the control she'd lost. she wondered why people, how people, could run around with nothing in their minds but survival. what is living if you are forced to sink into the earth and let others trample you? what is the point of life if you cannot thrive?

Alina walked toward him, and looked into his cold, gray eyes. She took his hand, and she thrived.

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